

ILLINOIS EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL

JANUARY 12, 2004

160 N. LaSalle St., Chicago, Illinois

10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

MEETING MINUTES

Present: Dr. Carol Adams, Ellen Alberding, Ann Alvarez, Martha Arntson, Lori Ann Baas, Angela Ball, Gayla Boomer, Constance Brown, Representative Elizabeth Coulson, George Davis, Mark Donahue, Arne Duncan, Elizabeth Evans, Claudia Fabian, Marilu Galan, Representative Deborah Graham, Senator Don Harmon, Phyllis Glink, Brenda Holmes, Judy Johnson, James Kaplan, Lanita Koster, Barry Maram, Janet Maruna, Dr. Samuel J. Meisels, Harriet Meyer, Janice Moenster, Carolyn Newberry Schwartz, Louanner Peters, Claudia Quigg, Bryan Samuels, Leo Smith, Luz Maria Solis, Jerry Stermer, Judith Walker Kendrick, Maria Whelan, Dr. Eric Whitaker; Sara Slaughter (for Adele Simmons), Kay Henderson (for Dr. Janet Steiner), Kay Wilmoth (for Joyce Thomas)

Absent: Guy Alongi, Richard Jones, Wanda Newell, Senator Carol Ronen

1. Welcome and Overview

The meeting was called to order at 10:10 a.m. The co-chairs of the Illinois Early Learning Council, Brenda Homes, Deputy Chief of Staff for Education from the Office of the Governor, and Harriet Meyer, President of the Ounce of Prevention Fund, welcomed Council members to the first meeting. Council members introduced themselves.

Ms. Holmes presented the Governor's vision for the Council: all Illinois children should be safe, healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter school. To fulfill this vision, the Council will create an early childhood system and look into ways to expand, enhance and coordinate existing early childhood programs.

Over the next few months, the Council will lay out short- and long-term action steps. The responsibility of the Council is to not just make recommendations, but to also create a realistic plan for implementation. If the Council is successful, then:

- All 3- and 4-year olds have access to quality preschool if their parents choose
- All parents have access to services that support their role in the optimum development of their children, starting at birth
- Parents can choose from a range of options that fit their needs
- Programs can collaborate more freely and blend funding streams
- Communities can help shape programs to meet local needs
- The early childhood workforce boosts its training, credentials and compensation
- Programs are supported in maintaining stable and well-prepared staffs
- Children will enter school ready to learn

Ms. Meyer presented an overview of the meeting agenda and objectives.

2. Purpose, Scope & Functioning of the Council

Ms. Holmes asked Council members to draw lots for 2- or 3-year terms as she outlined the role of the Council:

- Review recommendations of previous and ongoing early childhood efforts and initiatives and oversee implementation
- Develop multi-year plans to expand programs and services to address gaps and insufficient capacity and enhance quality
- Reduce or eliminate policy, regulatory and funding barriers
- Engage in collaborative planning, coordination and linkages across programs, divisions and agencies at the state level
- Report to the Governor and General Assembly on the Council's progress toward its goals and objectives on an annual basis.

The Council will meet quarterly, and its working committees will meet monthly. Committees will include Council members as well as additional early childhood stakeholders. Each committee will have public and private co-chairs. The Council's Executive Committee will be comprised of committee chairs and a few at-large members. The Executive Committee's role will be to set the agenda for Council meetings, move forward decisions of the Council, and coordinate the work between committees.

Ms. Holmes presented the five issue areas for the Council's committees and their chairs:

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| • Quality | Brenda Holmes and Judy Johnson |
| • Accountability | Sam Meisels and George Davis |
| • Expansion | Senator Carol Ronen and Harriet Meyer |
| • Linkage and Integration | Louanner Peters, Jerry Stermer and Ann Alvarez |
| • Workforce Development | Jan Maruna and Cordelia Meyer* |

The at-large members who will serve on the Executive Committee are Maria Whelan and Leo Smith. A form was distributed to Council members to indicate their preferences for committees on which to participate.

3. Early Learning Landscape in Illinois

Ann Kirwan presented a brief overview of the Early Learning landscape in Illinois, including: (1) what we know about children 0-5 in Illinois; (2) who's involved in providing programs and services; (3) what assets we have in Illinois related to early learning; and (4) what recommendations and priorities have already been articulated that can give direction to the Council's committees. (A handout of the power-point presentation can be found in Addendum A.)

4. Discussion of Goals, Committee Issue Areas and Priorities

Ms. Kirwan introduced potential goals and issue areas under each committee topic. For each topic, Ms. Meyer and Ms. Holmes facilitated a discussion among Council members about what specific issues each committee should address.

*Ms. Meyer was named as co-chair of the Workforce Development Committee subsequent to the January Council meeting.

Quality Committee: Enhance the quality of existing early childhood programs for children birth to five years of age and design a high-quality, voluntary, universal preschool model for all three- and four-year-olds.

Proposed issues for this Committee:

- Program Model Design
- Program Standards
- Incentives for Quality
- Comprehensiveness (e.g. social emotional, health, parent involvement)
- Accessibility (e.g. language, transportation, special needs)

Discussion:

- For Illinois to see a return on its investment in early childhood education, programs must be high-quality. Incentives for quality should be explored.
- The Quality Committee should consider various program model designs (as opposed to a single program model), including child care homes, home visiting, Early Intervention, etc., as well as addressing the needs and schedules of working parents. Programs are using multiple models now, and we should search for existing models in addition to designing new ones. It is imperative to work in collaboration with Head Start and child care to design models that meet a variety of families' needs (e.g., not just 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. or Monday through Friday models)
- The Council's committees will need to interact on various issues. The Executive Committee will grapple with cross-committee issues, directing big decisions to the Council and referring work to appropriate committees. Each committee will set benchmarks, and its charge will be overseen by the Council co-chairs and Executive Committee.
- This committee must consider programs' capacity. Tools should be made available to programs for capacity-building and to ensure consistency of levels of program quality across Illinois. Infrastructure – i.e. healthy management systems and practices – also has an impact on the quality of a program.
- Cultural sensitivity is needed as part of all committee discussions and as this group explores program models. With front-end work on building self-esteem for all, hate-crime commissions won't be needed.
- Parental involvement and consumer education are imperative to obtaining invaluable information, and as program models are designed, this committee should have a clear sense of what parents want. Strategies to build consumer demand for quality should also be explored. Outreach to parents is necessary to ensure that parents know which programs are available in communities; various avenues (e.g. media) could be used to accomplish this. Staff must be trained to deal with parents and in diversity issues.
- Literacy should be added to the comprehensiveness discussion, and recruitment should be added to the accessibility discussion.

Accountability Committee: Ensure programs are providing quality early learning opportunities and are appropriately assessing and supporting children's readiness to succeed in school.

Proposed issues for this Committee:

- Program Monitoring Systems
- Framework for Continuous Evaluation of Program Effectiveness
- Guidelines for Assessment of Individual Children
- Monitoring Trends in Children's School Readiness
- Cross-system Service Delivery and Child Outcome Data

Discussion:

- Various philosophies exist on conducting assessments with children younger than eight. Because of the various data requirements represented by the (above) five issues, and the complexity of assessments, different approaches are needed. Some are feedback loops, while some are not.
- The bridge from assessment of programs to implementation is often taken for granted, and this committee should strive to use the data to move programs forward. Teachers must use this data effectively; continuity is essential between student assessment and how teachers incorporate this information in their teaching approaches. Teacher training is essential.
- Consideration must be given to the community and the culture, to avoid a dual system of helping rich schools get richer. Accountability must be linked to the linkage and integration committee as it is important to identify barriers to learning and link children to the services they need. Linkage agreements among agencies could be established to facilitate this process. Must view the child within the family and community context; accordingly, must coordinate social services for parents and think about a diversity of models and services, including wrap-around services for families, without diminishing existing models.
- Various agency directors mentioned their view of accountability:
 - Ensuring that information on programs is distributed to families;
 - Ensuring that statistics that are captured relate to quality and progress of children and are utilized to better serve children;
 - Striving for compliance with regulations and expectations as well as for continuous improvement of program design; and
 - Ensuring that data collection on programs and children, including outcome measurements, self-studies and fiscal accountability, is incorporated into program design and improvement.

Expansion Committee: Expand access to high-quality preschool for all three- and four-year-olds by building upon and enhancing existing programs, beginning with those children most at-risk for school failure; and expand access to high-quality early childhood programs for all at-risk children under three years of age.

Proposed issues for this Committee:

- Inventory of Public and Private Early Learning Programs and Assessment of Need
- Serving At-risk 3- and 4-year-olds
- Universal, Voluntary Access to Preschool for All 3- and 4-year-olds
- Serving At-risk Children 0-3
- Infrastructure Costs
- Financing

Discussion:

- To ensure true system coordination, this committee should look at coordinating across agencies the on-going expansion and location of programs in communities and how needs change over time.
- Infrastructure of the whole program (i.e., not just the facility) should be considered.
- Setting priorities will be essential, and because of scarce resources, this committee must bring resources together efficiently. The importance of programs and services for the birth-to-three population cannot be lost in this allocation.
- This committee must think “out of the box” and raise quality in all types of early learning settings, as well as eliminating institutional barriers and biases that may preclude collaboration, such as the distrust that exists now between school districts and child care programs.
- To enhance the quality of existing programs and help to alleviate distrust, programs must be provided with a cost of living adjustment to meet the demands of expanding costs and services, including rising facility costs.
- This committee should address how expansion will flow to the local level and the process for linkages.

Linkage & Integration Committee: Improve coordination and integration across early childhood programs and systems to address the comprehensive nature of children’s healthy development and readiness for school.

Proposed issues for this Committee:

- Unaligned Program Requirements
- Linking License-exempt Child Care to Early Education Programs
- Smooth Transitions Between 0-3 and 3-5 Programs and 3-5 Programs and School
- Linking Early Learning Programs to: Specialized Developmental and Mental Health Services, Pediatric and Perinatal Health Services, and Public Benefits Programs

Discussion:

- Program funding requirements should be added to the list of discrepancies between programs.
- This committee must integrate early learning programs with systems such as healthcare to ensure that children are both eager to learn and healthy enough to do so. These families are often stressed by multiple issues in their lives, and Illinois must strive to provide “one-stop shopping” among early learning and other programs and services.
- License-exempt child care should be linked with early learning, respecting parental choice of child care options and providing quality preschool opportunities simultaneously.
- Strategies for system coordination should be developed outside of funding silos.
- Provider and consumer information is important; for example, pediatricians must understand other services and resources in their community.

Workforce Development Committee: Develop a statewide training and workforce development system to enable more early childhood practitioners to improve their skills through training and higher education.

Proposed issues for this Committee:

- Early Childhood Career Lattice Implementation
- Articulation Between 2 and 4-year Institutions
- Access to Education
- Compensation, Benefits and Recruitment
- Teacher Certification
- Bilingual Providers
- Capacity Issues in Institutions of Higher Education

Discussion:

- Parent involvement is an essential issue to be addressed in this committee. Practitioners must be trained on parental involvement, especially as it relates to bilingual and cultural issues.
- This committee should examine whether students are graduating with the skill sets needed to be effective early childhood education professionals, given the diversity of early childhood degrees. The career lattice being developed is one way to resolve this issue.
- Cultural sensitivity is imperative when discussing workforce development issues.
- To attract qualified teachers, recruitment efforts and scholarship money should be emphasized. Retention should be considered along with issues of compensation, benefits and recruitment.
- Currently, the requirements and template for the type 04 certification exists; however, this committee should explore whether parental involvement and diversity components are included in this template.
- Training, ongoing professional development and communication with practitioners should be addressed by this committee and others.

5. Next Steps

Committees will be meeting within the next few weeks. They are charged with devising objectives and timelines to address the assigned goal and identifying the information, data and resources needed.

The Council will meet three more times this year:

- April 19, 2004 (most likely in Springfield)
- July 19, 2004
- October 18, 2004

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

(Adopted on April 19, 2004.)